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SUBJECT: MANO DURA DEFINED BY GUATEMALA'S PARTIDO PATRIOTA

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (U) Summary. Partido Patriota (PP) leaders discussed with us the candidacy of Otto Perez Molina and expressed concern over voter apathy, smear campaigns and possible election day violence as the result of a newly decentralized voting system. They also demystified PP's "mano dura" campaign slogan by justifying the need for "hard-line" governance to ensure individual and economic security. End summary.

¶2. (U) On July 12, Poloffs accompanied INR analyst, Angela Emerson, to meet with Congresswoman Anabella de Leon and Christian Ros, Chief of Staff to PP presidential candidate Otto Perez Molina. De Leon took this opportunity to highlight her 20 years of government service and reflect upon voter apathy in Guatemala. She said that the lack of female participation in the political process was due to two reasons. First, many women, especially in rural areas, "did not exist" due to the fact they had never registered with the national registry. Second, culture played an important role in women's lack of participation. De Leon said that fear and silence dominated the country for a long time, and that women were only slowly beginning to participate. Additionally, she noted that the culture of "machismo" continued to suppress women's participation and that civil society had done little to help the situation.

¶3. (SBU) In preparation for the elections, party officials expressed concern over the likely upsurge in violence due to possible delays in election results. They stated that the Supreme Election Tribunal, TSE, was one of the few institutions that was respected by the population, but they feared the TSE would lose this respect due to increased perceptions of fraud and election mismanagement.

¶4. (SBU) This year, the election process has been decentralized, creating more voting stations in an effort to increase political participation and accessibility. De Leon and Ros agreed that this decentralization was a positive change, but also noted the TSE did not have sufficient resources to handle such an increase in infrastructure and demand. As a result, they believed that the increase in voting stations would slow the final count of ballots as much as six hours or longer depending on the weather. Results would be available the next day, rather than at midnight as is customary. They stated that the consequence of these slower results could increase the frustration of the population already hesitant to trust the election process, and could generate suspicions and concerns of election fraud, especially in rural areas.

¶5. (SBU) Party officials also expressed concerns over the "smear campaign" of Alvaro Colom's UNE party. They accused Colom of meeting with Honduran President Mel Zelaya to discuss his campaign strategy. They asserted that Colom felt threatened by the increased popularity of the PP in the polls

and, therefore, blamed the PP for the recent murders of bus drivers in Guatemala City, accusing PP of intentionally creating a climate of fear to garner wider public support for its strong security platform. De Leon asserted that these accusations were without merit, and that they would only succeed in creating more apathy among voters who consequently would be less likely to participate on election day.

¶6. (SBU) Ros elaborated on the platform of Perez Molina, defining "mano dura" ("hard-line") as "security guaranteed by the letter of the law, no more and no less." He admitted that the party debated using this phrase as their campaign slogan due to Perez Molina's military background and the history of Guatemala, but finally decided that the slogan did not equate to repression or a return to Guatemala's past. The "mano dura" platform, as explained by Ros, included citizen security and economic security. Perez Molina would commit himself to enforcing the law by strengthening government institutions and demonstrating zero tolerance for corruption. Ros stated that the Attorney General's office, which only successfully prosecutes two percent of crimes, was an embarrassment and required additional prosecutors and investigators. Party officials were careful to explain their platform's security goals and that, although Perez Molina played a leadership role in the military during the internal armed conflict, he was a unique military figure who "always defended the constitution" and strongly supported the Peace Accords playing an important role in convincing his fellow military leaders to agree to them.

¶7. (U) De Leon categorized Guatemala as a quasi-failed state, and contended that the foundation of strong security and employment opportunities would create a framework for "progressive development" for the country. Ros acknowledged that more than 10 percent of Guatemalans had immigrated to other countries and blamed the deteriorating economic and security situation. He applauded PP's Vice Presidential Candidate Ricardo Castillo for his proven skills in the area of economic development. He stated that Castillo was an important businessman with a proven record as a consensus maker between management and union leaders. He also noted that Castillo would be a key player in the economic security and growth of Guatemala. The party hoped to replicate Castillo's economic development success in Retalhuleu in the Eastern part of the country. Ros said that the economic plan for the PP focused on tourism, an underdeveloped sector of Guatemala's economy due to the high rates of crime.

¶8. (SBU) Comment. Party officials' reflections on possible election result violence are buttressed by recent smear campaigns in the press, increased crime rates as the election nears and growing public concern over security. Escalating party rivalry has also created friction between the two leading camps, especially as PP continues to hold a strong second place behind UNE in the polls. We expect to see a rise in smear campaigns and inter-party attacks as we approach election day. In terms of PP's "mano dura" platform on security, while party officials presented us with a seemingly comprehensive plan to guarantee the personal security of citizens and economic growth of the country, no reference was made as to how they plan to fund and implement such ambitious programs.

Lindwall